

The Message of Love

Text: I Corinthians 13

I knew for almost two years now, that I would be required to deliver my last sermon as the Lay Minister of this charge. This sermon in effect has been the result of two years of pondering this subject. But unlike the movies which proclaim a film as an epic, two years in the making with a cast of thousands I find that I cannot say this. The only thing I can say about this message is that it is a summation of what I have been trying to preach here for these two delightful years.

If we earnestly search the Gospels we find that the one thing Jesus stressed was love. He spoke of love very often. Yet the word love down through the years has lost some of its meaning. Mention the word love today in many circles and to each one it has a far different meaning. This is due to the fact that the word too often has been used in a degrading way. The movie industry is partly responsible for this. They will advertise a certain movie as, "A shameful tale of love," or, "A forbidden love," or some other wild title. Immediately the word love is thought of in the same terms and category as sex, so it is something that is spoken of in whispers. Let a preacher get up on a Sunday morning and preach about love and right away he is a dirty old man. Look at the forms of love in our nation today. The hippies band together and sit idly meditating and this is love. Others smoke pot and try to live in a dream world and this is the world of love. Others destroy homes and property in the name of love. But this is not the true love of which Christ spoke, nor of what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about. This is something far removed from love and going mistakenly under the name of love.

In the time of Paul, the same thing must have been taking place or something very similar to it. Because he very carefully sets down a set of things which love is not. Then he sets down what love is, and so we can see from his guidelines what forms love takes and what forms it does not take. Paul was speaking of Christian love. This is a love that is more of a concern for others. An outpouring of our selves in the service of mankind. A giving not only of what we have

but a sharing of ourselves. To a ~~real~~ Christian this means sacrifice. Too often we look at and think of sacrifice as being done only in the Church. But this is not

. To sacrifice means to give up something. We all lead busy lives and keep busy schedules but we should never become too busy that we cannot give someone who needs it a moment of our time. I know that nothing can be ^{MAKE} irritating or frustrating ^{THAN} to come home from a very difficult day and to find something or someone that requires our help or assistance. But this we must learn to do graciously and uncomplaining, if we want to be Christian in action as well as in name. We must make that extra effort to help when the opportunity arrives. This is the mark of love. The story is told of Thomas Huxley the English biologist and educator who was an avowed agnostic. He was at a house party and stayed the weekend as a guest at this house along with some of the other guests. When Sunday morning came everyone made preparations to go to church. Mr. Huxley approached one of the other guests, a man known to have a very simple and radiant Christian faith. He said to him, "Suppose you don't go to church today. Suppose you stay at home and you tell me quite simply what your Christian faith means to you and why you are a Christian." "But," said the man, "you could demolish my arguments in an instant. I'm not clever enough to argue with you." Huxley said gently, "I don't want to argue with you; I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you." And so the man stayed home from Church and he told Huxley very simply of his faith in Christ and what it meant to him. When he had finished there were tears in the great agnostic's eyes and he said, "I would give my right hand, if only I could believe that." It wasn't clever argument that moved him. It was the simple presentation of Christ that tore at his heart. But equally important is the fact that the man who stayed away from church did so at a sacrifice. A sacrifice he felt he had to make for Christ. This is love as expressed in the giving of ourselves to others.

If we are to love, we must give of our substance. In our modern cultured society we express this giving in one lump. If you recall in the past the agencies seeking funds each year would have their own separate little campaigns to raise the needed funds. So today they have all banded together and when we give a gift to the United Fund we are in fact giving to a dozen or so agencies all in one lump. So in effect it has become easier to give our gifts. Yet this has also had the effect of taking the personal touch out of the giving. By this I

mean that we cannot be as selective as we once were. If for instance we felt a strong feeling against a certain organization we could refuse to give to it when we were approached. But we cannot do this anymore. But another thing that has been the outgrowth of this type of giving is the fact that we sort of give without much in the way of love. We give perhaps because the other fellows in the plant ^{WE ARE} will think ~~I am~~ ^{WE} cheap if I do not give as much as they do. We give because our neighbors may think less of us if they find out we have not contributed our fair share. Our giving instead should be from the heart, from what we feel for those in need and not by motives that are strictly for show or outward display of how wonderful we are in our giving. I ran across two little illustrations that prove this point more adequately. One concerns a woman who answered the door ^{ONE DAY} and there on her doorstep was a beggar looking for a handout. She got her purse and when she did she discovered that all she had was a large bill. She said to him, "All I have is this large bill, but I need a loaf of bread, go and buy the loaf of bread and bring me back the change." The man went to the store and returned and gave her the money. She gave him a small sum of it and he took it with tears in his eyes, as he told her, "It isn't the money, it's the way you trusted me. No one ever trusted me like that and I can't thank you enough." This woman took a risk that perhaps only a fool would do. But she gave this man more than money, she gave him of herself. Her love for mankind. Another man was walking down the street and a beggar tugged at the sleeve of his coat. He reached into his pocket and discovered that he had no money. He reached out his hand and he said, "My brother, I can give you nothing but this." The beggar said, "You called me brother, you took my hand, that too is a gift." The comfortable way to discharge our duty as a church member or as a private citizen is to give a sum of money and get it done and over with. But in true giving the giver must also give of himself, and this involves love. "I may dole out all I possess, or even give my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I am none the better."

This love must also be one that is lived daily. It cannot be just something we talk about on Sunday and forget the rest of the week. It must be lived. This story of Abraham Lincoln I have used before, but I feel that it bears repeating. It concerns Mr. Lincoln and his choice for secretary of war in his cabinet. No one ever treated Mr. Lincoln with more contempt than did Edward M. Stanton

